United Nations A/63/723

General Assembly

Distr.: General
18 February 2009

Original: English

Sixty-third session
Agenda item 49
Sustainable development

Letter dated 17 February 2009 from the Permanent Representative of Uzbekistan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to convey to you information on the announcement of 2009 as the Year of Development and Improvement of the Countryside in the Republic of Uzbekistan (see annex).

I would appreciate it if you could circulate the attached information as a document of the sixty-third session of the General Assembly under agenda item 49, "Sustainable development".

(*Signed*) Murad **Askarov**
Permanent Representative of the Republic of Uzbekistan

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Annex to the letter dated 17 February 2009 from the Permanent Representative of Uzbekistan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

[Original: Russian]

2009 is declared the Year of Development and Improvement of the Countryside in Uzbekistan

The President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov, declared 2009 the Year of Development and Improvement of the Countryside at a ceremony dedicated to the sixteenth anniversary of the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

The Uzbek countryside is unique in its beauty and colour. The best qualities of the Uzbek people are most clearly in evidence in the countryside, whose inhabitants are noted for their generosity, simplicity and honesty. As our Head of State has said, for us the countryside represents our roots and is a symbol of our homeland. The great and sacred concept of the "Motherland" and the image of the village of our birth are inextricably linked.

Wherever the citizens of Uzbekistan live, their common destiny is linked to the countryside. For the countryside is the source of our national prosperity and our daily bread. Therefore the future success of Uzbekistan, the enhancement of its people's well-being and the fulfilment of our good intentions begin with the development of the countryside.

Ever since the first years of independence, the Head of State, Islam Karimov, has paid particular attention to addressing the problems of the countryside and improving the standard of living of its inhabitants. For example, between 1992 and 1994 the rural population received more than 400,000 hectares of land allotments, and stockbreeding has been developing apace. All of this is producing significant results. Great efforts have been made to supply gas and drinking water to the rural population and to improve the quality and level of health services.

As a result of the implementation of the objectives set out in the presidential decree of 10 November 1998 on the State programme for reform of the health-care system in the Republic of Uzbekistan, more than 3,100 rural health posts with modern diagnostic and therapeutic equipment have been set up. The effectiveness of public health and prophylactic services has improved.

Reforms aimed at promoting the physical and spiritual education of young people have been effective and have produced significant results. Today, modern academic high schools, vocational colleges, schools and sports facilities have been built in Uzbekistan's most remote villages. Since the beginning of 2008 alone, 149 vocational colleges, 634 comprehensive schools and 184 children's sport centres have come into operation, most of them located in rural areas.

Ongoing attention is being paid to the development of services in the countryside. Recently, thousands of facilities for trade, catering, consumer services and vehicle repairs have opened. Extensive efforts have been made to establish a network of services for farms, to provide microcredit and consumer loans and to improve the payment system.

The economic basis for the efforts under way in Uzbekistan to boost creativity, provide amenities and improve the provision of materials and equipment for the education, health and social security systems — in general, the huge changes taking place in all areas of life — are inextricably linked with the development of the agricultural sector.

The President's particular interest in the transfer of land to farmers and the development of the agrarian movement is producing results. For example, although 2008 was a relatively difficult year for Uzbek farmers, the country's cereal growers still produced 6,175,000 tons of grain.

Today any farmer will tell you that the progress we have made has been driven by the introduction of new economic and social relations, most importantly the transfer of land to its rightful owners, a profound sense of ownership among farmers and a change in their relationship with the land and the fruits of their labour.

In 2008, the agricultural sector grew by 104.5 per cent, and production of vine crops, potatoes, vegetables, fruit, meat, milk and eggs has been increasing from year to year.

In 2008, more than 16,000 head of cattle were auctioned to the public. More than 18,000 families were provided with cows free of charge. The overall number of cattle increased by 6.9 per cent compared with 2007. Similar positive results were achieved in horticulture, winegrowing, fish farming and other areas.

The current goal is to improve the standard of living of the rural population and to continue the intensive development of agriculture and improve its efficiency.

In this new year, 2009, which President Islam Karimov has declared the Year of Development and Improvement of the Countryside, the practical work carried out in this regard will be expanded even further.

A special State programme has been elaborated, focusing in particular on raising the standard of living in the countryside, improving the legal basis for the protection of the interests of rural people, enhancing cultural life in rural areas, providing employment for the rural population, in particular young people, and boosting people's income and well-being. There is no doubt that the achievement of these aims will help to improve further the image of the Uzbek countryside and to raise the standard of living for its inhabitants.

Specific plans have been drawn up for more comprehensive reforms in agriculture, support for the agrarian movement, protection of the interests of owners, entrepreneurs and businesspeople, improvement of the condition of reclaimed land, protection of public health, improvement of the public's health awareness, provision of better equipment for the health system, and expansion and mandatory implementation of qualitative health indicators.

The following are just a few examples of the objectives that have been set. In 2009, repairs will be carried out on 1,913.9 kilometres of public roads in rural areas and, in order to improve public transport services, 67 new bus routes will also be put in place for rural inhabitants. In 2009, 168 children's sports facilities will be constructed or modernized in rural areas. There is a plan to build six academic high schools, 164 vocational colleges and 65 comprehensive schools. Through the development of the service sector in rural areas, in particular the establishment of

retail, catering and consumer service outlets, it is expected that 140,000 new jobs will be created.

The food crisis of 2008 demonstrated the strategic importance of rural development. The State programme for food security, in particular grain security, adopted in 1992 on the initiative of the President of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov, has proved its worth. Uzbekistan has become an exporter rather than an importer of grain. Before 1995, more than 2 million tons of grain was imported each year, but in 1995 Uzbekistan became self-sufficient in grain, and in recent years it has exported more than 1 million tons to such countries as Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and others.

Moreover, Uzbekistan is now fully self-sufficient in all basic foodstuffs: grain, meat, milk, potatoes and others. It is now the largest exporter of fruit and vegetables among the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Of the 6 million tons of vegetables, fruit and grapes produced in Uzbekistan every year, up to 2 million tons is exported to the Republic of Korea, countries in the CIS and the European Union, and a number of other States.

In the context of global climate change and violent fluctuations in the world food market, which are affecting farming in unpredictable and negative ways, Uzbekistan's ability not only to provide itself with food but also to be one of the largest exporters in the Central and South Asian region is helping to bolster world food security.

Uzbekistan fully shares the view of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), set out in its report *The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2008*, that efforts to address the food crisis should focus on small-scale farmers. "In the medium-to-long term, the focus should be on strengthening the agriculture sectors of developing countries ... This is essential not only to face the current crisis, but also to respond to the increasing demand for food, feed and biofuel production and to prevent the recurrence of such crises in the future."

2009 — the Year of Development and Improvement of the Countryside — will undoubtedly be one of the most prosperous and successful years yet for the Uzbek people.